



An employee publication of the
Texas Department of Criminal Justice

September/October 2015
Volume 23 Issue 1

Agency News

TDCJ values armed service veterans, names employment liaison

Nearly thirty-seven thousand men and women work for TDCJ, and many of these dedicated professionals began their public service before joining the agency. TDCJ currently employs more than 5400 US armed forces veterans and 644 staff members who serve with the National Guard or Reserves, including 73 on active duty.

TDCJ values the work experience and technical skills acquired by U.S. veterans and has long supported both active duty personnel and veterans who have served their nation. TDCJ Human Resources Director Patty Garcia underscored the agency's desire to increase recruitment among armed service veterans, saying, "TDCJ values the service of all veterans, and the Human Resources staff, recruiters and the veteran's liaison work to be accessible and informative for veteran applicants who are considering TDCJ as their next employer."

Consistent with legislation effective September 1, Human Resources Section Director of Employment Paula Gilbert also serves as the agency's veteran's liaison. Connections



Human Resources Recruiter Renee Langston discusses employment options with a lieutenant stationed at Fort Hood Army base.

recently sat down with her to talk about her duties and the agency's commitment to recruiting service veterans for employment.

TDCJ has a long history of supporting veterans. Can you describe the reason for this commitment?

It's a mutually beneficial relationship; former military personnel like the familiar military-like structure of the corrections staff

and time has proven that the work ethic, discipline and professionalism associated with military service personnel is an excellent fit for a career in criminal justice. Former service members come in with career goals in mind and tend to advance quickly.

How does TDCJ make a career in corrections attractive to military personnel?

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Veterans who have been honorably discharged from the service and come to work for TDCJ enjoy many employment benefits. First, they're exempt from the correctional officer pre-employment screening test; a service member within six months of leave can walk into an employment fair and a recruiter will be on hand to walk them through the application process and interview them the same day. By the time they're honorably discharged, we only need a copy of their Terminal Leave Letter signed by their commanding officer and they can report to the agency's pre-service training academy. Second, applicants with at least two years honorable military service are hired at a rank of Correctional Officer III with a starting salary of more than three thousand dollars a month.

Another benefit for service veterans is the agency's Veteran Reinstatement Policy, described in PD-76, which allows employees who leave the agency for military service to return on the same career path if they resume agency employment within five years. That means if a Correctional Officer III leaves the agency and serves five years in the armed forces, they can be reinstated as if they never left, including salary and benefits. In this example, the officer would be reinstated as a CO V with an additional five years' state service.

What are your responsibilities as TDCJ's veteran's liaison?

I feel like I'm acting as a bridge from these potential employees to the agency. We need good employees in our agency and many veterans have the skills we're seeking, but for some who have made the armed forces their only career, the prospect of searching for a good job in unfamiliar terrain can be overwhelming. I help them navigate TDCJ policy and procedures and learn about their potential employment benefits as they transition to state service. I've also found that many of them benefit from the one-on-one contact with someone familiar with state employment. I routinely respond to phone calls and emails about employment eligibility and the application process. Many of the vets have never had to search for a job or go through the interview process, so I'm there to help.

I also work to ensure we have agency representatives at veteran hiring events throughout the state.

Can you tell us more about how TDCJ recruits veterans?

We mail employment packets with specific information about benefits veterans receive to military installations throughout the United States. We also have a video available on our website and YouTube. Military Veterans and TDCJ has been viewed more than 7,000 times in less than a year.

We've also been placing an emphasis on attending military recruitment events. We currently have 12 Human Resources recruiters

who work regionally, traveling throughout Texas and to military installations in other states. By having them available to interview potential employees, we're showing these veterans we're interested in them and what they can offer our agency. That is a distinct advantage.

How else does TDCJ support veterans who come to work for the agency?

We have an initiative to facilitate direct hiring of disabled veterans and, with the help of Senate Bill 389, have begun including Military Occupational Specialty Codes on job postings. These codes are assigned to specific job functions in each military branch. Having them listed on the job posting will make it easier for veterans to find a position that closely corresponds with their military experience. The applicants are still required to summarize their employment on their application and meet the minimum qualifications for the position.

Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers?

As veteran's liaison, my job is to be a resource to these men and women and let them know that TDCJ appreciates the service they've given to this country. In the process, I hope I can ease their transition from an armed service member to state employee. My contact information is available online. ●